

REVIEW ARTICLE

After the Storm

Matsumoto Shirō's Transition from "Critical Buddhism" to "Critical Theology"

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MATSUMOTO Shirō 松本史朗, *Dōgen shisō ron* 道元思想論. Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan, 2000. x + 672 pp. ¥15,000 cloth, ISBN 4-8043-0543-2.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED to Critical Buddhism (*hihan Bukkyō* 批判仏教) since the high point of "the storm"? That is how co-editors Jamie HUBBARD and Paul SWANSON (1997) referred to the period of intense controversy concerning the movement's methods and conclusions about "true" or pure Buddhism based on causality versus "impure" or corrupted Buddhism. According to Critical Buddhism, the contaminated *ātmavāda*-like doctrines of original enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覚), *tathāgatagarbha* (*nyoraizō* 如来藏), and Buddha-nature (*bussō* 仏性) have contributed to social deficiencies in Japan, such as compliance with nationalism, militarism, emperor veneration, Japanism, and social discrimination.

In the past few years the hyperbole of Critical Buddhism that dismissed so many doctrines, schools, and individuals as heretical or un-Buddhistic has declined. The focus has largely shifted to a more localized debate on the role of theology (*shūgaku* 宗学) within Sōtō studies.¹ MATSUMOTO Shirō's new book, *Dōgen shisō ron* (Studies of Dōgen's thought),² which advocates a position he refers to as "Critical

¹ The term *shūgaku* literally means "sectarian studies" but has the broader implication of "theology" in the sense used by David Tracy: "intellectual reflection within a religious tradition" that is situated between talk about God and historical studies (cited in JACKSON 2000, p. 2).

² The first half of *Dōgen shisō ron* deals exclusively with Dōgen and the debate about Critical Theology, and the second half—which is not discussed in this review—examines nearly three dozen post-Hui-neng masters of Chinese Ch'an, as a follow-up to MATSUMOTO's previous

Theology” (*hihan shūgaku* 批判宗学), reveals the underlying theological agenda of Critical Buddhism and highlights an important discussion about how to conduct sectarian scholarship and appropriate the meaning of Dōgen’s life and thought. Other participants include Tsunoda Tairyū 角田康隆, who champions “Orthodox Theology” (*dentō shūgaku* 伝統宗学), Yoshizu Yoshihide 吉津宜英, who seeks to relativize theological standpoints in terms of “Flexible Theology” (*yasashii shūgaku* やさしい宗学), and Ishii Shūdō 石井修道, who develops an approach he refers to as “Renewal Theology” (*shin shūgaku* 新宗学) in response to the other scholars. The outlets for the debate include a variety of journals, especially a recent specialty publication, *Shūgaku to gendai* 宗学与現代.³

The storm over Critical Buddhism swept into the world of Western scholarship in November 1994. At that time, a panel on Critical Buddhism was held at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Washington, D.C. that included Hubbard, Swanson, Dan Lusthaus, Yamabe Nobuyoshi, and myself, and featured a response by Matsumoto, one of the two main leaders of the movement along with Hakamaya Noriaki 袴谷憲昭. The real thunder and lightning took place later that afternoon at a panel on original enlightenment thought when the respondent, the late Nagatomi Masatoshi of Harvard University, departed from commenting on the panel papers in order to challenge Matsumoto, who was sitting in the audience and entered into a vigorous debate with Nagatomi and others in attendance. The storm first began in Japan ten years earlier with a lecture in 1986 by Matsumoto that attempted to reverse centuries of mainstream doctrine by declaring the heresy of *tathāgatagarbha* thought (MATSUMOTO 1989). The cycle of interaction between Japanese and Western scholarship was completed when Hubbard led a workshop on *Pruning the Bodhi Tree* at the University of Tokyo in June 1998.

Although Matsumoto has always been at the center of the storm, he probably remains less known and certainly less controversial than his senior colleague Hakamaya. Both scholars, who are specialists in Indo-Tibetan Yogācāra Buddhism and former students of the University of Tokyo professor Yamaguchi Zuihō 山口瑞鳳, share the fundamental concern of challenging traditional Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine as

book on Zen (1995) that dealt largely with the *Diamond Sutra* and Lin-chi. It is interesting to note that the 1995 volume also includes an article on the 12-SH that expresses more ambivalence about the significance of this text than is conveyed in Matsumoto’s new work—the source of the ambivalence is that at the time Matsumoto was not so convinced that the 12-SH is consistent with regard to a clear exposition of causality.

³ The main sources for the debate include Matsumoto’s book under review here, TSUNODA 1998 and 1999, YOSHIZU 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, and ISHII 1998.

well as Japanese Buddhist practices and attitudes, particularly in the Sōtō sect. Hakamaya and Matsumoto were members of a select committee of Komazawa University professors and Sōtō leaders that tried to grapple with the issue of how social discrimination had infiltrated Buddhism in light of the so-called “Machida incident.”⁴ They seek to overturn the way true Buddhism based on the principles of karmic causality (*inga* 因果) and dependent origination (*engi* 緣起) has been contaminated by indigenous animism and a long-term syncretism with Shinto practices in Japan. Whereas Hakamaya is often scolded for his vituperative rhetoric, Matsumoto adopts a more restrained style, although he has been willing to criticize Tibetan Buddhism at the height of the worldwide popularity of the Dalai Lama and sympathy for the plight of the Tibetan diaspora (MATSUMOTO 1997).⁵

“Critical” versus “Orthodox” Theology

Several years after the height of the storm, Matsumoto’s work remains committed to the methods and ideals of Critical Buddhism. Yet his new book shows that Critical Buddhism has undergone a significant transition. It is no longer a freewheeling, ideological social activism that criticizes traditional Buddhist views in the Yogācāra school and the *Lotus Sutra* as well as the Kyoto School and *Nihonjinron* 日本人論 theory in modern Japan. For Matsumoto, it now has a specific goal of creating a transformation “from ‘Orthodox Theology’ (*dentō shūgaku*) to ‘Critical Theology’ (*hihan shūgaku*)” (see pp. 1–12). This alters the way Dōgen and his writings have conventionally been interpreted based on the unchallenged assumptions of the sectarian tradition. It develops a method that highlights Dōgen’s apparent profound “intellectual change” late in his career and the emphasis on karmic causality in his later writings, especially the 12-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 (hereafter 12-SH) (HEINE 1997).

The factors driving the broader mandate of Critical Buddhism have faded for several reasons since the initial wave of self-criticism and self-examination triggered by the Machida incident. On the one hand, Critical Buddhism has enjoyed a modest degree of success in affecting discourse in Japan and the West as well as the actual attitudes and behavior of Sōtō Zen priests, especially in funeral practices

⁴ This incident took place in 1979 when Machida Muneo, then the secretary-general of the Sōtō sect, blatantly denied the role of discrimination in Japanese Buddhism at a world parliament on religion and peace (BODIFORD 1996, HUBBARD 1997).

⁵ One of the aspects of Tibetan Buddhism that disturbed Matsumoto was the unwitting but nevertheless troubling compliance he believed existed between AUM cult leader Asahara and the Dalai Lama several years prior to the infamous AUM subway poisonous gas attack.

dealing with outcasts and discriminated groups (BODIFORD 1996). At the same time, there seems to be a diminished sense of urgency about social causes in Japan, ironically because a variety of factors have created a greater sensitivity to ethnic diversity. These include internal or domestic pressures from minority and exacerbated communities as well as growing international scrutiny and a critique of the role of discrimination and chauvinism in the Japanese social system. Also, the aftermath of the 1997 economic crisis and growing concern about the impact of population decline have led to an increase in the importation of foreign workers, mainly of Japanese descent, such as the *nikkei* community (Japanese Brazilians).

While the social situation has been changing in Japan, there has also been considerable criticism of the “methodological inadequacies” of Critical Buddhism (O’LEARY 1998, p. 279) voiced by a variety of observers, including scholars who are otherwise sympathetic and supportive of the larger social causes addressed by the movement. In particular, Critical Buddhism has been accused of “oversimplifying complex doctrinal and historical developments” (GREGORY 1997, p. 289) in terms of a conflation of ideological assertions about what Buddhism should stand for and textual historical claims concerning the doctrines the tradition has or has not actually expressed. It has also been criticized for reducing the study of Buddhist approaches to a polarity of true vs. false, or right vs. wrong perspectives. Also, Critical Buddhism has been challenged for not constructing a compelling social activist agenda, apparently leaving it up to correct doctrine to solve all social ills (STONE 1999, p. 183).

More significantly, Critical Buddhism has been criticized for an excessive valorization of Dōgen. In spite of its insistence on the ongoing function of a critical outlook, Critical Buddhism has, according to William BODIFORD, “join[ed] the long history of Sōtō sectarian studies (*shūgaku*) in presenting an idealized image of Dōgen (or, better, Dōgen Zen) unconnected to Sōtō institutions or even to traditional Sōtō teachings about Dōgen” (1996, pp. 21–22). One of the problems is that Critical Buddhism has generally ignored the role of other Kamakura leaders, such as Hōnen, Shinran, Nichiren, Eison, and Nishō, all of whose teachings and lifestyles are more conducive to social reforms than the aristocrat elitist, Dōgen. The larger implication is that Critical Buddhism contributes to a shielding of the sect’s founder from any blame while the responsibility for causing discrimination and other societal problems is placed on diverse social and ideological forces other than Dōgen. This raises the specter of the charge that Critical Buddhism is in basic agreement about the infallibility (*mubyōsei* 無謬性) of the sect’s founder with traditional, orthodox Sōtō

scholarship it has often attacked.

In response to the critics, Hakamaya has more or less abandoned the study of Dōgen and published a book on the Yogācāra school as well as another volume that emphasizes the importance as a model for Critical Buddhism of Hōnen 法然, whom Hakamaya contrasts with Myōe 明恵 in a way that Matsumoto has severely criticized, thus marking a significant split within Critical Buddhism.⁶ Also, revealing that theology may well have been the basis agenda of Critical Buddhism all along, Matsumoto, who once accused Hakamaya of “Dōgen worship,” has now taken over the focus on Dōgen that Hakamaya initiated with his studies of the 12-SH (HAKAMAYA 1992, HEINE 1999). Matsumoto concurs with and elaborates on many of the ideas about Dōgen introduced by Hakamaya, especially the fundamental intellectual change that Dōgen underwent during his trip to Kamakura in 1247–1248 and the question of how this led him to craft the 12-SH based on the notion of karmic causality, particularly in the “Jinshin inga” 深信因果 (deep faith in causality) and “Sanjigo” 三時業 (effects of karma in past, present, and future) fascicles. In contrast to the orthodox viewpoint, which stresses the importance of Dōgen’s early writings and the basic consistency of the religious outlook throughout his career, Matsumoto divides Dōgen’s career into two phases: “before the change” and “after the change” that was caused when Dōgen saw the corruption of Zen monastic meditation in the shogun’s endorsement of samurai values in Kamakura.

Tsunoda Tairyū is the staunch defender of the orthodox position who has engaged in a spirited but open-minded and constructive debate with Matsumoto and other scholars. According to Tsunoda, Orthodox Theology represents a standpoint between a religious practice-oriented reverence toward the *Shōbōgenzō* and the Critical Buddhist approach expressing a clear preference for the 12-SH over other editions of Dōgen’s main text. In the essay “‘Hihan shūgaku’ hihan” (Criticism of Critical Theology) and related essays, Tsunoda maintains that Critical Theology is actually a critique of Sōtō theology (‘*hihan shūgaku’ wa shūgaku hihan de ari*) and ends with a “criticism of the Sōtō sect’ (*Sōtō-shū hihan*) based on the teachings on the sect’s founder” (as cited in Matsumoto’s book under review, p. 19). Tsunoda’s approach is influenced by leading twentieth-century Sōtō sect theological historians including Nishiari Bokusan, Kishizawa Ian, and Etō Sokuo, who all stress the significance of early 75-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō* (hereafter 75-SH) fascicles such as “Bendōwa” 弁道話 (Discriminating

⁶ Matsumoto has recently published a book on Hōnen and Shinran in which he severely criticizes Shinran (see MATSUMOTO 2001).

Contrast of Orthodox and Critical Theology		
METHODOLOGY	MAIN TEXT	VIEW OF DŌGEN
Orthodox Theology Buddha-nature and original enlightenment thought	75-SH , esp. “Bendōwa” “Genjōkōan” “Busshō”	Consistency and continuity (no intellectual change)
Critical Theology Karmic causality and dependent origination	12-SH , esp. “Jinshin inga” “Sanjigo”	Fundamental intellectual change after Kamakura trip

Figure 1. Composite of figures in MATSUMOTO 2000, pp. 6 and 108.

the Way), “Genjōkōan” 現成公安 (Spontaneous realization of the kōan), and “Busshō” 仏性 (Buddha-nature).

The manifesto for Critical Theology suggested by Matsumoto can be summed up as follows:

- a. an anti-mystical and anti-esoteric outlook
- b. an anti-guru mentality and anti-infallibility standpoint
- c. a critical approach to texts (Sōtō texts and sutras), practice (zazen), and doctrine (dependent origination)
- d. a recognition of the primacy of Dōgen’s intellectual change
- e. a stress on the differences between zazen based on attaining a trance state beyond conceptuality and zazen based on self-reflection driven by rationality and logic
- f. a strong commitment to social activism and reform

On the basis of the methods used by the predecessors he evokes, Tsunoda denies that Orthodox Theology is involved in a) and b) and he basically agrees with c) and f), yet considers the main doctrine to be the notion of a universal, all-pervasive Buddha-nature and believes the distinction in e) between reason and trance is artificial and misleading. Tsunoda accepts f) with some reservations, but wholeheartedly negates d), which is the crux of the Critical Theology position. For Orthodox Theology, there is no sign of either a significant decline and deterioration or a resurgence and restoration of Dōgen in the post-Kamakura period of his life.

One of the main contributions of Matsumoto’s approach has been a clarification of a key issue left unclear in Hakamaya’s arguments about the role of the 12-SH and its emphasis on causality. What was

Contrast of Immanent and Phenomenal Buddha-Nature

Immanent Buddha-nature

Realm of Universality = “Realization of all dharmas based on self” =
 “Direction of delusion” = “One side is illumined, the other side remains dark”

Phenomenal Buddha-nature

Realm of Particularity = “Self is based on the realization of all dharmas”
 = “Direction of satori” = “The moon reflected in water”

Figure 2. Composite of figures in MATSUMOTO 2000, pp. 197 and 222.
 The partial quotations refer to passages in the “Genjōkōan” fascicle.

Dōgen’s attitude toward original enlightenment thought prior to the change of heart in Kamakura? There seems to be a contradiction in the writings of Hakamaya, who at times praises “Bendōwa” for critiquing and distancing itself from the original enlightenment and Buddha-nature doctrines and yet at other times rejects all of Dōgen’s writings other than the 12-SH for falling short of wholeheartedly endorsing dependent origination (HAKAMAYA 1989, pp. 134–58; HAKAMAYA 1992).

Matsumoto’s approach is based on distinguishing two views of Buddha-nature theory: immanent Buddha-nature (*busshō naizai ron* 仏性内在論), which sees all sentient beings possessing the ultimate reality, and phenomenal Buddha-nature (*busshō kenzei ron* 仏性顕在論), which sees ultimate reality manifested in all sentient beings. According to Matsumoto, the early Dōgen made a dramatic breakthrough from the extremely misguided view of immanent Buddha-nature that was prevalent in both the Chinese Ch’an and Japanese Tendai schools to an improved though still, in the final analysis, deficient view of phenomenal Buddha-nature. Matsumoto provides a detailed examination of how this breakthrough is expressed in the “Genjōkōan” fascicle. He cites the passages, “To have practice and realization about all dharmas based on the self is delusion, but to have practice and realization of the self based on all dharmas is enlightenment”; and “When you see forms or hear sounds by fully engaging body and mind, although you grasp things directly, it is not like an image cast in a mirror or the moon reflected in water. When one side is illumined, the other side remains dark” (DŌGEN 1970, p. 35). According to Matsumoto, the point of these passages is to contrast the immanent and phenomenal standpoints, as shown in Figure 2.

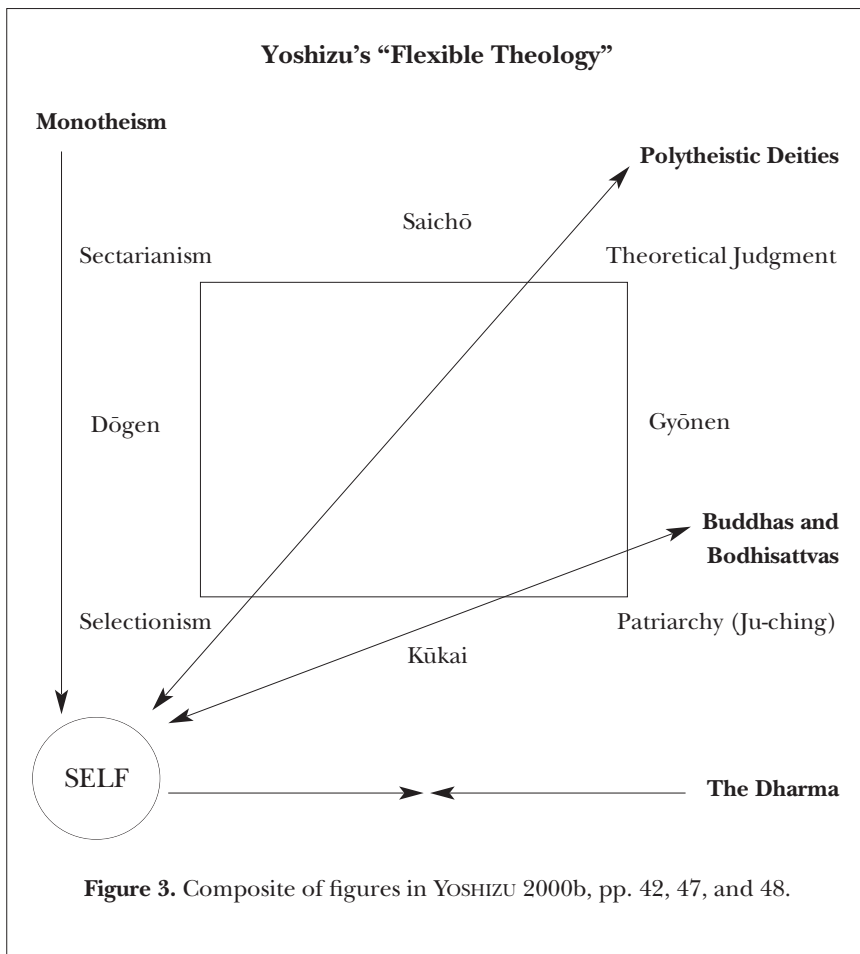
Matsumoto also argues that some oft-cited passages in 75-SH fascicles express the standpoint of phenomenalism. These include the following passages in *Bendōwa*: “The zazen practiced by one person at one time pervades all things and permeates all times,” and “earth, grass, trees, walls, tiles, and pebbles all engage in Buddha activity” (DŌGEN 1970, pp. 14–15). The main goal of highlighting the conflict between immanentalism and phenomenalism in the early period is to show, in basic accord with Hakamaya, that Dōgen was struggling to break free of original enlightenment ideology but did not succeed until his return to the basic Buddhist concept of causality in the late, post-change, 12-SH period.

“Flexible” and “Renewal” Theologies

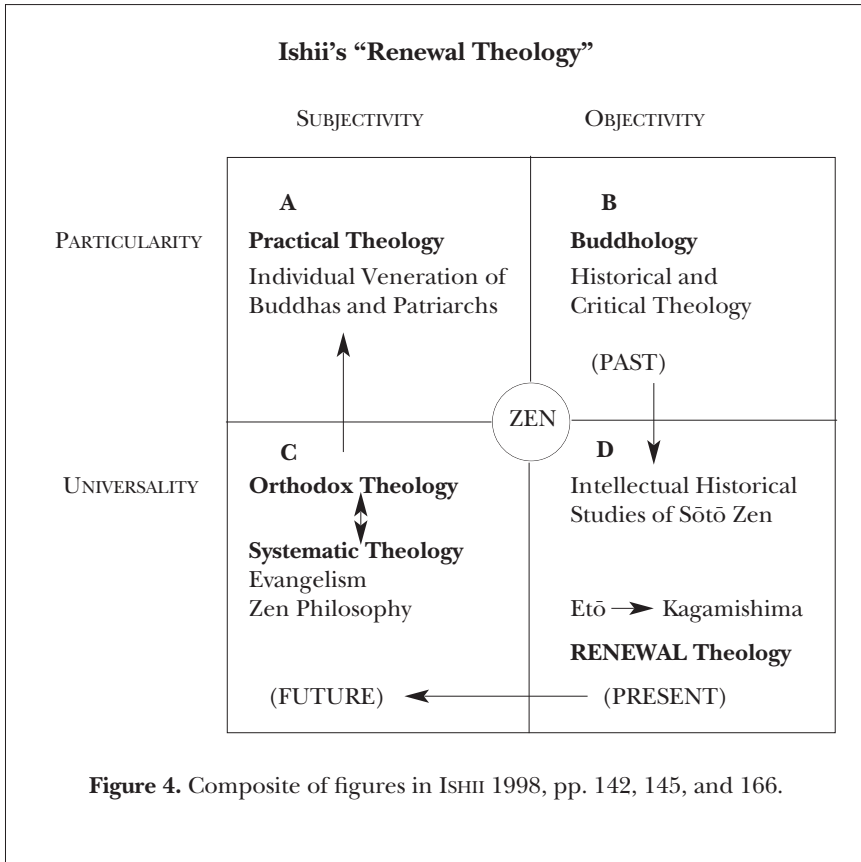
Matsumoto does an excellent job of explaining the stages of Dōgen’s intellectual development, but he does not seem to escape the charge of an idealization of the Sōtō founder, although he claims to reject strongly the principle of infallibility (which Tsunoda also denies). The limitation of Matsumoto’s approach is that in interpreting the influences on Dōgen it blurs the historical differences between the Ch’an and Tendai schools, the contexts of Buddhism in China and in Japan, and the doctrines of original enlightenment and Buddhahood. To what extent is Dōgen’s view of phenomenalism derived from Japanese Tendai yet different from Chinese Ch’an? As a scholar of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, Matsumoto fails to engage the significant recent scholarship of Kuroda Toshio, Taira Masayuki, and Matsuo Kenji on the history of Japanese Buddhism and the key question of the role of original enlightenment thought in the transition from the Heian to the Kamakura era.

Yoshizu Yoshihide’s approach is a corrective that situates Dōgen in the larger historical context of different styles of Buddhism. Flexible Theology (Yoshizu suggests a translation of “kind theology,” and other alternatives are “cheerful,” “joyful,” or “easygoing”)⁷ attempts to avoid the extremes of infallibility and hyper-criticism by at once showing the strengths and limitations of Dōgen’s outlook in relation to other key Japanese thinkers. Figure 3 represents a composite of two diagrams. The base, outer diagram deals with the range of beliefs about the fulfillment of selfhood, covering typical, vertical Western monotheism, polytheism, and devotional/esoteric Buddhism on the diagonal plane, and the horizontal monism of early Buddhist and Zen medita-

⁷ Yoshizu posits *yasashii Bukkyō* as a middle ground between *amai Bukkyō*, or a simplistic or simple-minded approach, and *kibishii Bukkyō*, or an overtly strict and inflexible approach.



tion. Superimposed on this is an inner configuration of four Buddhist perspectives and their connections to four great Buddhist leaders. Saichō's 最澄 approach, according to Yoshizu, is located between a sectarianism that insists on a specific "correct" approach to religious attainment (Yoshizu situates Critical Theology here) and the hierarchical classification or theoretical judgment of the traditional *kyōhan* 教判 method. Gyōnen 凝然, author of the *Hasshū kōyō* 八宗綱要, is located between *kyōhan* and a humanistic or patriarchal approach that recognizes religious insight embodied in charismatic individuals; and Kūkai 空海 is located between patriarchy and the selection of a single practice that was typical of Kamakura leaders. Dōgen is located between sectarianism and selectionism—in other words, for Yoshizu, Dōgen is a product of his times and should not be considered to have transcended the constraints of the ideological environment of medieval



Japan. Yoshizu fully appreciates but is not bound by Dōgen's standpoint.

Whereas Yoshizu's Flexible Theology relativizes Dōgen vis-à-vis various medieval thinkers and ideologies, Ishii Shūdō's Renewal Theology attempts a comparable relativization of contemporary theological methodologies. Ishii was an early though partial supporter of Hakamaya (see ISHII 1987), and he continues to embrace the idea of an intellectual change in Dōgen that is the centerpiece of Critical Theology.

However, Ishii maintains that Matsumoto as well as Tsunoda and Yoshizu are limited for several reasons. First, he situates Tsunoda's Orthodox Theology and Yoshizu's theology, which Ishii refers to as an example of Systematic Theology, in the C corner because both undertake a form of philosophical theology that advocates a particular ideological position. Ishii considers Critical Buddhism in general, and that of Matsumoto in particular, to be located in the B corner because it is an approach rooted in Buddhology and a reconstruction of the historical

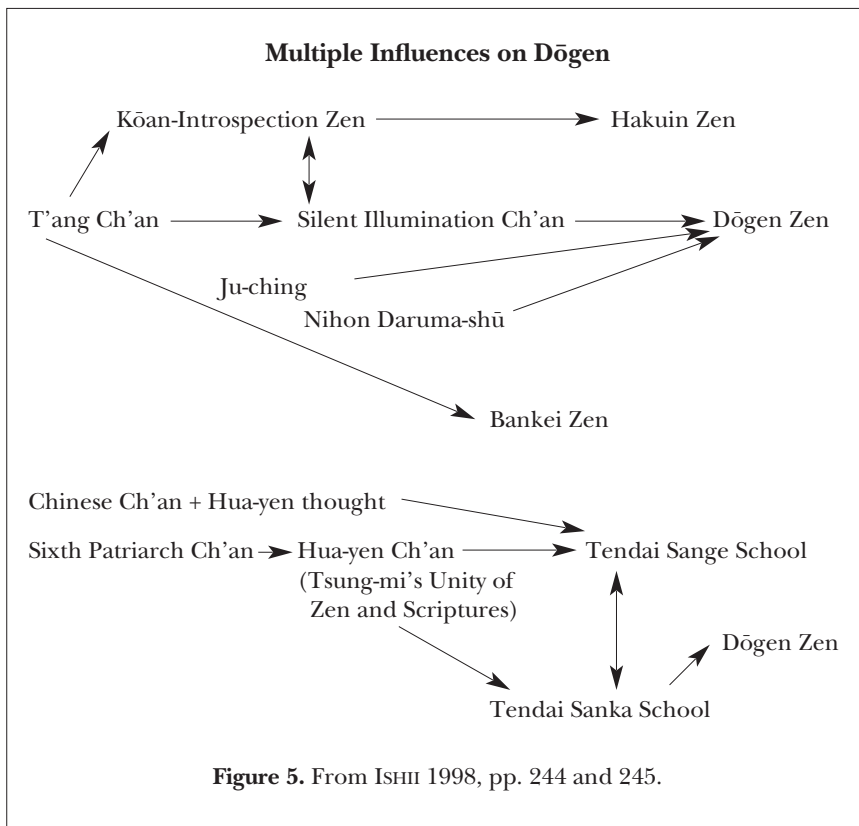


Figure 5. From ISHII 1998, pp. 244 and 245.

context of Dōgen’s thought, but he acknowledges that the positions of Matsumoto and Yoshizu could well be reversed. The textual scholarship of Kagamishima Genryū serves as the main model influencing Renewal Theology, which is continually regenerative and self-critical, by helping establish two main points overlooked by Matsumoto.

The first point refers to the extent of the multidimensional influences on Dōgen stemming from various elements of Chinese Ch’an and Japanese Buddhism, as shown in Figure 5.

The second point involves a detailed analysis of what can be called, for want of a better term, the “late late Dōgen.” Ishii stresses that the 12-SH cannot be seen in isolation from the other main work of Dōgen’s later period, the *Eihei kōroku* 永平広録, a collection of sermons mainly delivered at Eihei-ji. He examines how the style and content of Dōgen’s *Eihei kōroku* was altered significantly in the post-change period, that is, the differences between the *Eihei kōroku* sermons before and after the visit to Kamakura. By showing that the late, late period Dōgen, as evidenced in his sermons, supported the view of karmic

causality also expressed in the 12-SH, Ishii actually provides much of the textual historical evidence that substantiates Matsumoto's claims about the extent of Dōgen's intellectual change (ISHII 1994).

In conclusion, let us reconsider the charge that Matsumoto is engaged in an idealization of Dōgen. In the aftermath of "the storm," it appears that all four scholars involved in the Critical Theology debate, with the possible exception of Yoshizu, are implicated, and the debate itself seems to compound the problem. On the other hand, the debate makes clear that the real issue is not an idealization but an appropriation of Dōgen from multiple perspectives. As Ishii shows, the legitimate aim of theology is to grasp the meaning and significance of its target by exploring the target from shifting methodological standpoints. In that sense, Ishii belongs with the others in the Systematic Theology corner, but at the same time each of these scholar/theologians (*shūgakusha* 宗学者), including Tsunoda, continues to rotate self-critically through the varying outlooks and outreaches of accessing Dōgen's complete collection of sacred texts (*seiten no zenshū* 聖典の全集). In this way a hermeneutics of Buddhism becomes a Buddhist hermeneutics (*Bukkyō no kaishakugaku wa Bukkyōteki na kaishakugaku ni naru* 仏教の解釈学は仏教的な解釈学になる).

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